
Citation:

Gibbs, G (2010) Book review: Using assessment to support student learning. *Assessment, Teaching & Learning Journal*, 9. p. 44. ISSN 1756-8781

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Book review

Using assessment to support student learning

by **Graham Gibbs**

Leeds Met Press, 2010, 48 pages, £12.00
ISBN 978-1-907240-06-5

This manual, primarily aimed at course leaders, offers an invaluable overview of the ways in which assessment can be used to promote student learning, rather than simply measure achievement. It is firmly grounded in theory, presenting, in a concise and persuasive way, a number of overarching concepts and arguments drawn from the burgeoning body of assessment-related research. Threaded throughout there are references to the author's own empirical research studies. These help to authenticate the ideas and throw light on students' experiences of assessment, set within the everyday contexts of contemporary university settings.

Gibbs' manual is full of important messages which teachers looking to evaluate and improve their practice should find useful. One of the main lessons is the need to pay careful heed to the ways in which students might view and react to assessment. Common challenges and problems are identified, encouraging teachers to think seriously and carefully about students' responses to the assessment environments they design. Custom and practice are sometimes questioned, giving readers pause for thought, and practical suggestions for re-engineering assessment environments are highlighted. The emphasis throughout is on developing realistic, feasible principles and guidelines which can be put into practice.

The book remains acutely sensitive to the practical pressures teachers and students encounter at the chalk-face. Case studies from academics at Leeds Metropolitan University bring the ideas to life, and are helpfully located in a range of disciplines, again offering plenty of food for thought for hard-pressed members of staff looking to develop their assessment practice. Finally, a number of audit tools are included, which can be used to review and evaluate one's own assessment practice. This, of course, dovetails neatly with the book's philosophy: encouraging readers to practice what the literature preaches!

Professor Kay Sambell
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